

2-13-15

Louise Downer, Secretary 2
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I am writing to you because I need your assistance in a legislative process for "Hazardous Duty" for the clerical employees presently employed by the Department of Correction. This letter is in support of the Request of Petition for Declaratory Ruling of Statute #5-173. My justifications for such a request are as follows:

This is a summary of my job duties and experience working inside a correctional institution. I have been a clerical employee for the Connecticut Department of Correction for 24 years, and I belong to the NP-3 bargaining unit.

(1997 – present) I am a Secretary 2 at Brooklyn Correctional Institution, which is a facility that houses 506 male inmates; the majority of them are sex offenders. I currently work with the Custody Supervisors (Captains and Lieutenants) of the institution. My office is located within the facility in the Custody Department. Working in this area, I am exposed to disruptive inmates when they are escorted to the Captain's office or Lieutenant's office after incidents to be questioned during investigations (internal or external with outside law enforcement agencies) or to be issued Disciplinary Reports for their poor behavior. I have also assisted in report writing of incidents involving sexual activity, pornographic material, assaults / fights, medical emergencies, etc. Some of the details of these incidents have been graphic in nature.

I supervise inmate janitors in this area and inspect their work on a daily basis; and I am frequently left alone with these workers. At any time, I am at risk of potential inmate assault (physical / sexual) as these workers have access to broom/mop handles and cleaning chemicals, which can be used as weapons.

For the past 15 years, I have co-facilitated the Brooklyn Cares Program with a Correctional Counselor here. We work with and give direction to the 6 inmates who volunteer with this Program. Brooklyn Cares has been very successful and has made numerous charitable contributions to the local community over the years. I am also responsible for reviewing photos inmates have taken for inappropriateness or gang activity.

I have been the Notary Public at Brooklyn CI since 2005. As a Notary, I deal directly with the inmate population. I frequently receive and answer inmate requests regarding Notary Public, the Brooklyn Cares Program, & the Inmate Photo Program.

(1991 – 1993) When I started with the Department of Correction, I was assigned in the School Department at Brooklyn CI. Part of my daily duties was to supervise the Inmate Library 2 hours a day, 4 days a week for the entire inmate population. Due to budget cuts, I did this alone for almost 2 years with no Custody staff assigned to work with me. I was once 'sued' by an inmate for not making free copies or providing him with writing material in the law library. He became verbally abusive and refused my direction to leave the Library. I had to call a Supervisor for assistance to have him escorted out of the area. The inmate's allegation was unfounded. On a few occasions, I had to utilize my body alarm because inmates were involved in physical altercations in the Library. I was required to write Incident Reports and Disciplinary Reports due to these incidents.

(1993 – 1995) I also worked in the Inmate Records Office at Brooklyn CI and Radgowski CC. We were required to retrieve various court documents, release from custody packages, transfer files, etc. from the A/P Room a few times a day. Inmates were always present in this area transferring in or out to other facilities or for court appearances. Records staff were responsible for collecting and verifying bond money from inmate's families bailing them out of jail. We frequently received phone calls from inmates' families with questions about various things regarding court dates, length of sentences, jail credit, release dates, visiting, loss of privileges due to disciplinary reports, bond amounts, etc. Many times they were not happy with the answers they were given and were difficult to deal with.

(1995 – 1997) At Corrigan CI, my office was located in an inmate housing unit. I worked with a Unit Manager, and we were responsible for two housing pods. I also assisted with Security Risk Group hearings in the Special Management Unit, which is a restricted area.

Over the years, I have received sexually explicit anonymous notes from inmates, which were very inappropriate. I have been subjected to cat calls and whistles while walking through the facility during mass movement or when entering a housing unit. This behavior is harassing and very intimidating. Clerical staff who do not work in a correctional institution are not subjected to this kind of environment.

During all different times of the day, clerical staff walk down the hallways among inmates during mass movement (meal times, various programs, recreation, work call/school call) to go between offices as part of their daily duties.

Clerical staff are required to attend the same mandatory annual training as Hazardous Duty staff to include subjects such as: sexual assault in prison, blood borne pathogens, CPR, First Aid, Fire Safety, Inmate Suicide Prevention, Stress Management, Security Risk Groups, Prison Rape Elimination Act & Behavior Management. Also, during facility emergencies, we are required to assist in whatever means necessary. I act as an Emergency Recorder in the Control Center.

All other institutional staff - Wardens, Deputy Wardens, Captains, Lieutenants, Correction Officers, Counselors, Maintenance, Food Service, Education, Religious, and Medical staff receive a 20-year hazardous duty retirement. All of the above named staff members are required to work 20 years and receive 50% of their pay regardless of their age. Clericals are the only staff who work in correctional institutions and are not hazardous duty. Clerical staff are required to work until the age of 63 as well as have 25 years of state service to receive 38% of their pay. Per our union contract, clerical staff who work in correctional institutions receive a .65 cents per hour 'hazardous duty' stipend (which is what it states on our paychecks), yet it is referred to as 'unpleasant duty pay'. This pay acknowledges our unique situation working in a correctional facility, but does not make our classification whole.

Clerical staff supervise inmates and are subjected to the same risk of assault (physical or sexual), hostage situations, facility emergencies, inmate fights, etc. as the rest of the hazardous duty employees here. Staff that work with us assume we are hazardous duty just as they are. Clericals work in the same environment and are subjected to the same hazards and dangers as all other staff are, yet we are not treated equally for the job duties we are responsible for. On a daily basis, all staff are subject to risks of injury due to our work environment. We are a team, working together under the same roof with the same inmates; regardless of classification or job title.

It is mandatory that all staff are tested annually for TB; staff may be exposed to TB or other health hazards by working in a correctional facility. I was exposed to TB in 2002. I was required to take medication for 9 months, which frequently made me nauseous.

When reviewing my work experiences for my testimony to you, it came to light that the experiences that I have had for the past 24 years are not 'normal' working conditions that the common clerical worker experiences. Receiving sexual requests from unidentified inmates, compiling investigative reports that include graphic incidents, profanities, naked pictures; witnessing inmates fighting, etc. are not typical clerical job duties in an office setting.

Something to note: there are hazardous duty staff who are assigned to work at various DOC sites who do not have inmate contact; some have not worked inside a correctional facility for years and they are still eligible to receive a 20 year hazardous duty retirement. In other State Agencies, staff who work in similar situations are not eligible for a 20 year hazardous duty retirement if they do not have direct inmate contact.

Thank you for your time and consideration in this matter; is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Louise Downer